

Concept Plan Alternatives

Alternatives Development

Following analysis of existing conditions and in response to the stated planning objectives, three concept plan alternatives were created: “Heavy Industry and Parks,” “Parks and Light Industry,” and “Parks and Residential.” These concepts built upon previous planning efforts, following recommendations contained in the “Gateways to the River” report published in 1997. A *Star Tribune* article on the three alternatives dubbed the heavy industry option the “Working River,” and the two options with continuous parks the “River Green.”

Given the high degree of land-use change entailed in creation of a continuous riverfront park corridor on the west bank, the three alternatives vary most in parkway and land-use patterns explored for the area between Interstate 94 and the river. On the east bank Marshall St. is the logical boundary for a new continuous park corridor, and all three of the plans have similar treatments for that area. Although most of the discussion focuses on options for the west bank, the magnitude of the proposed park creation and improvements to Marshall Street on the east bank should not be discounted.

Overall Planning Issues

While the planning objectives for the Upper River Master Plan are straightforward, a wide amount of latitude remains regarding the pattern of new land uses, size of parks, alignment of parkways, options for rail service, and the optimal mix of land uses for community formation and economic development. Over the course of alternatives development, a weighing of values and perceptions about the potential of the land found expression in the concepts developed. Although the three concepts presented in this report contain the broad approaches, many more variations on the basic themes were also tested and set aside.

During this alternatives development phase the task was to translate policy issues and planning objectives into questions and options that could be expressed in the form of two-dimensional land-use plans.

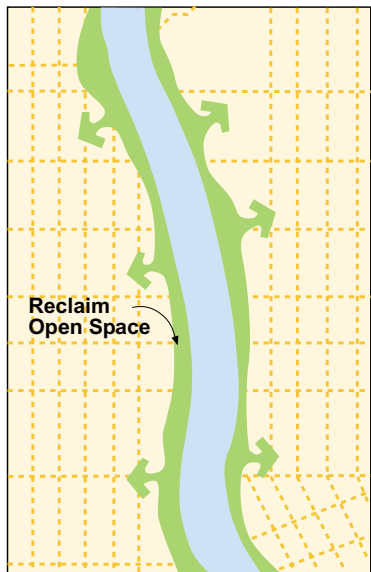
Major physical planning issues:

1. Can the planning objectives be met with continued barging and heavy industry?
2. If barging is discontinued, what is the best pattern of land uses to take advantage of the inherent opportunities?
3. Is it possible to introduce a mix of uses, including housing on the west bank?
4. How can potential conflicts between various uses be minimized and mitigated?
5. How much land should be devoted to parks along the river?
6. Are parcels remaining after park depth is set viable development sites?
7. What areas will still require rail service and how should spurs be configured?
8. What are the options for mitigating the impact of commercial truck and commuter traffic on Marshall St.?
9. How can recreational use of the river be promoted?
10. What configuration of uses will provide the highest return in tax base and social benefits?

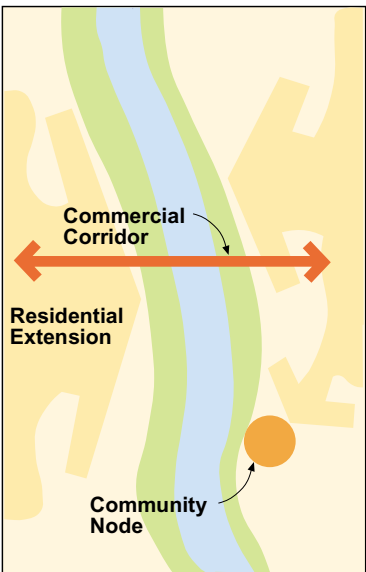
Planning Principles

A set of principles were formulated to guide overall planning and the creation and evaluation of alternatives. The principles, described on page 41, recognize the unique character of the Upper River and seek to integrate best planning practices into the concept plans.

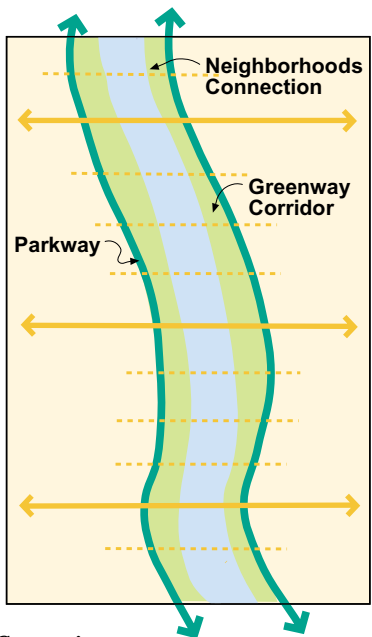
Upper River Planning Principles



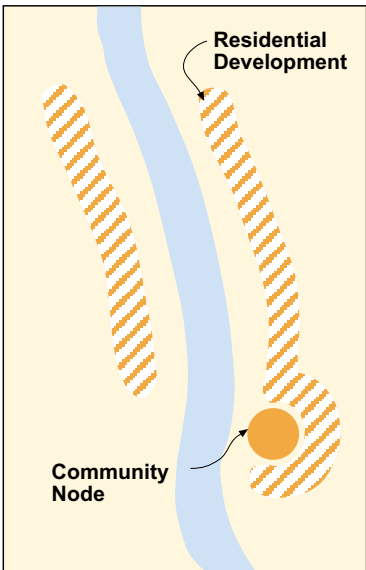
Reclamation
Reclaim open space for the benefit of the community and ecological health of the river.



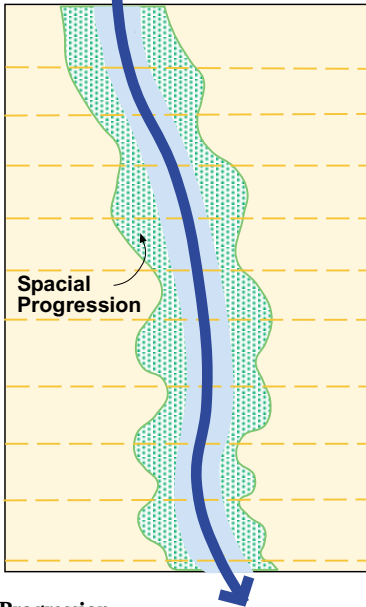
Extension
Extend urban fabric of houses, commercial buildings, and infrastructure to and across the river.



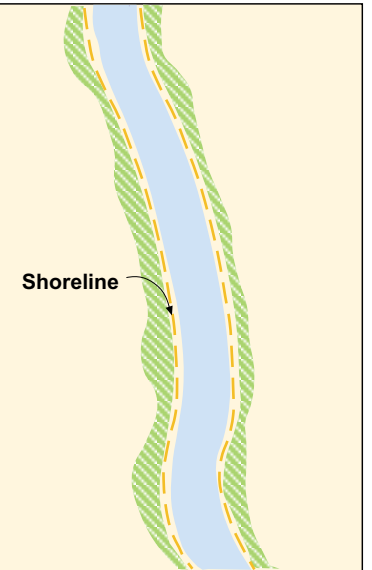
Connection
Provide visual and physical links between two sides and along the river.



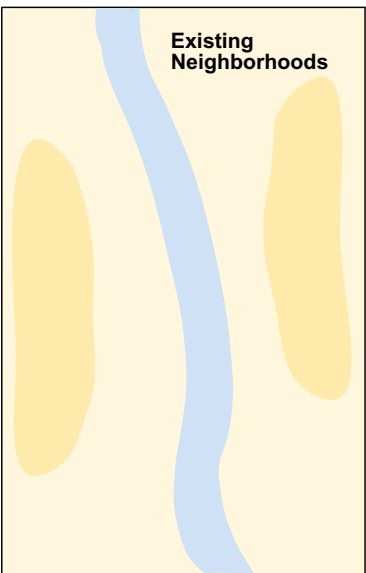
Revitalization
Revitalize underutilized industrial corridors, commercial and residential properties. Reuse historic structures.



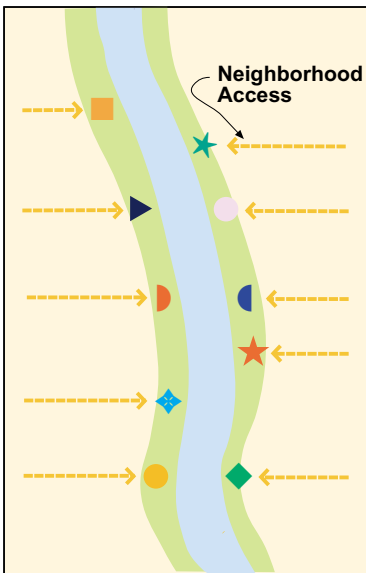
Progression
Vary the spatial, textural, and formal aesthetic experience of the river corridor, upstream and downstream.



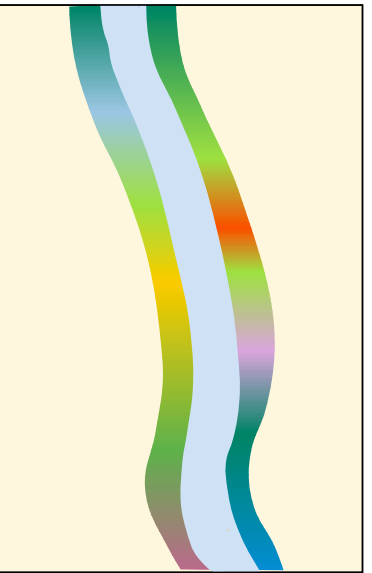
Restoration
Improve ecological performance of the river edge and islands. Conserve quality environmental features



Stabilization
Stabilize existing neighborhoods and river enhancing uses.



Destination
Provide new and exciting destinations for recreation and social life on the Upper River.



Differentiation
Differentiate the park design along the linear riverfront to heighten variety and interest.

Common Elements

A number of elements appear in all three of the concept alternatives, especially in regard to the east bank. Many of these proposed features address issues at the system-wide scale, in the areas of access, ecology, traffic, and community enhancement.

Common elements include:

- A continuous riverfront park from Grain Belt to the NSP power plant on the east bank.
- Streetscape improvements for local and regional routes leading to the river.
- Observation areas at the river end of “gateway” streets leading to the river.
- A new commercial truck and automobile route utilizing the BNSF railroad corridor on the east bank. This route would relieve traffic on Marshall St. and allow it to be redesigned as a true parkway, north of 16th Ave. N.E.
- Redevelopment of the Grain Belt Brewery complex, with commercial and community facilities.
- Lowry Place commercial node at Lowry and Marshall.
- Restoration of riverbank, where needed in all areas parallel to new parkways.
- Rail service to the *Star Tribune* printing plant at 10th Ave. N. is retained.

Park Programming Scenarios

In addition to the land-use plans shown for the three concept alternatives, accompanying park programming scenarios were developed. These park programming alternatives can be found in the Appendix. Various themes were tested including retaining remnants of the Upper River’s industrial heritage as park features. Locations for major park features were also proposed, including an amphitheater, small boat marina, water park, beach, and Ferris wheel on the BN Bridge. Issues arising from these park proposals are discussed in the Evaluation and Synthesis sections of this chapter.

Key park programming issues addressed:

1. How can the linear park corridor be programmed to provide a variety of experiences?
2. How far apart should park features and nodes be spaced to encourage and reward continuation along recreational trails?
3. What are the appropriate themes for the Upper River parks? Is an overall theme desired?
4. Should active recreational areas, including sports fields and facilities, be placed along the river?
5. What new facilities, such as boat launches, fishing piers, and beaches, are desired to encourage recreational use of the river?
6. How should programming vary in response to adjacent residential or light-industrial uses?
7. Can or should existing and new riverfront hospitality venues be integrated into the park plan?
8. How much of the new parklands should be devoted to ecological restoration, including habitat areas, and how much to active and passive uses?

Upper River Master Plan Study Area



Existing conditions are shown in this aerial photograph looking south toward downtown. In the foreground is the Camden Bridge, with I-94 to the right, and the domes of the Upper Harbor Terminal visible next to the river.

Heavy Industry and Parks

Description

The “Heavy Industry and Parks” alternative assumes continued barging on the Upper River. This alternative is essentially a reiteration of the concept plan contained in the 1997 “Gateways to the River” report. The Upper Harbor Terminal is retained, with the idea that other barge terminal operators south of Lowry could be relocated to the UHT area. West River Parkway is extended as a narrow strip along the river, then directed west before Lowry, and connected to Washington Ave. N. Rail service continues on both banks, but the BN Bridge is converted for use by pedestrians and bicyclists.

Features

- * 57 acres of new parkland.
- * 10 miles of bike lanes and recreation trails.
- * 3.75 miles of parkway or boulevard.
- * Trails and parkway separated from waterfront north of 31st Ave. N., a 1.5 mile gap.
- * Washington Ave. used as parkway connection.
- * BN Bridge is converted for recreational use.
- * 2 miles of riverbank restoration.
- * Approximately 50 new housing units, all as infill on east bank.
- * 62 acres for business park and light industry



Photomontage rendering shows aerial view south to downtown. New parks on the east bank are highlighted in green, as are new parks up to Lowry on the west bank. Heavy industry dominates west bank.

Plan Critique

- Does not meet master plan objectives:
 - No continuous park and trails on west bank,
 - As a truck route, Washington Ave. N. can not be a parkway, too far from river,
 - Consolidation of heavy industry costly, benefits few, available land inadequate.
- Takes out private barge terminals, but leaves UHT.
- Single barge terminal may not be enough to keep locks open.
- Moving scrap metal yards to UHT likely to introduce new environmental problems.
- Ecological restoration goals compromised.
- Few benefits to adjacent neighborhoods, especially on west bank.
- Potential for few users of new parks on west bank.
- No relationship, synergy between banks.

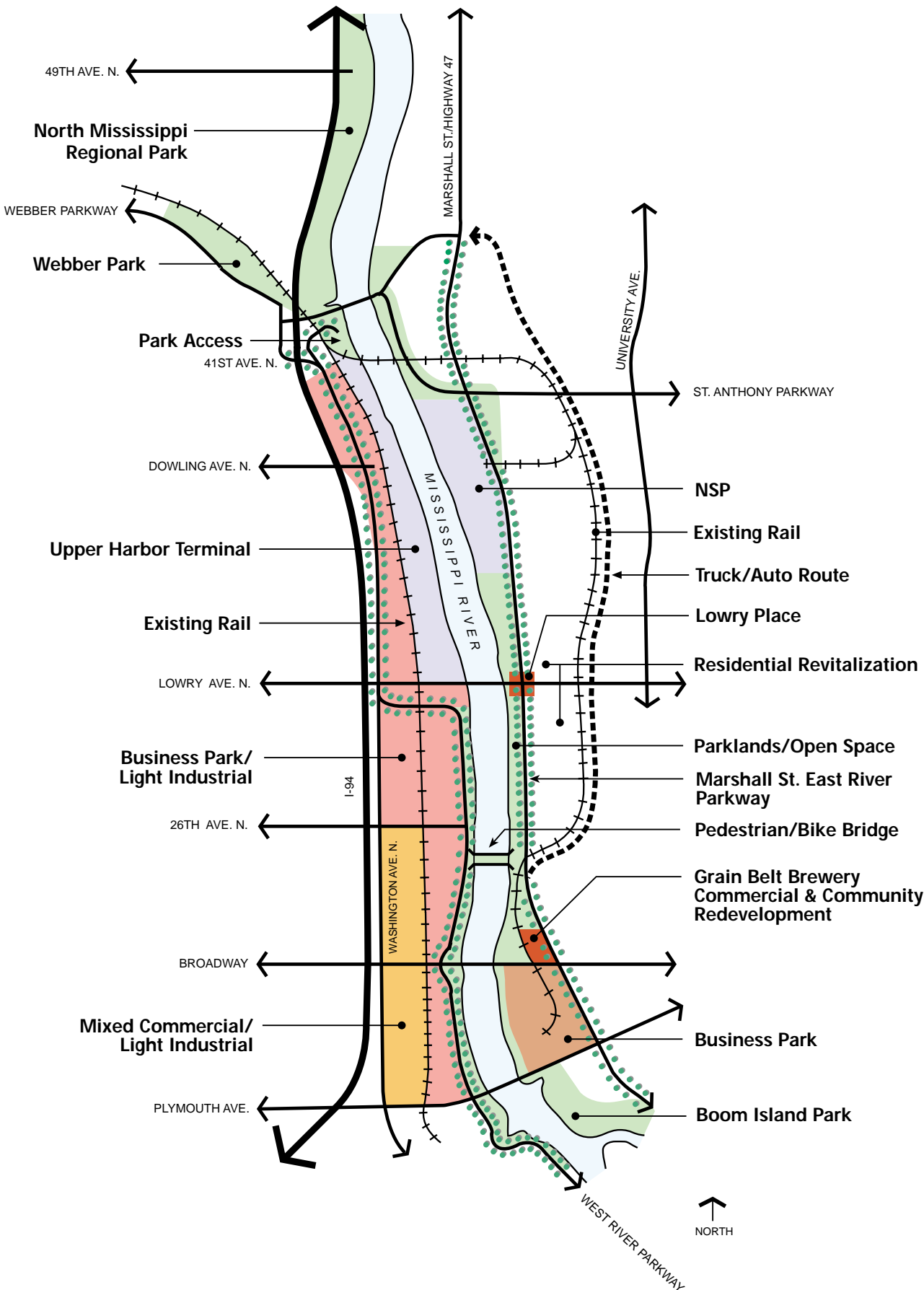
Implementation Issues

- Side steps issue of long-term future of barging.
- Unlikely to find broad support and funding.
- Limited economic benefit, but high costs.
- Weak justification for action.

Heavy Industry and Parks

“Working River”

First Option



Distinguishing Features

- ◆ Barging on Upper River continues.
- ◆ Upper Harbor Terminal retained.
- ◆ Consolidation of heavy industry in UHT area.
- ◆ West River Parkway directed away from river onto Washington Ave.
- ◆ BN Bridge converted to pedestrian and bicycle facility.
- ◆ Rail service continues on both banks.

Parks and Light Industry

Description

The “Parks and Light Industry” alternative anticipates that barging on the Upper River will decline and be discontinued. The riverbank is given over to parks along both sides of the river, for the whole length of the study area (excluding NSP). The key issue becomes one of land use adjacent to new parks, especially on the west bank. Although the broad label calls for additional light industry, the development of office buildings and laboratories is also included, with a site design aim of quality structures set in landscaped sites. This alternative follows long-standing City policies regarding the Upper River area, with a goal of converting heavy industries with outdoor storage, to light industries and offices. The North Washington Industrial Park (NWIP) project is an ongoing effort, begun in the 1970s to facilitate this conversion, and provides an example of the type of structures that can be anticipated under this land-use classification.

Features

- * 162 acres of new parkland.
- * 15 miles of bike lanes and recreation trails.
- * 5.25 miles of parkway or boulevard.
- * BN Bridge is converted for recreational use.
- * 4 miles of riverbank restoration.
- * Approximately 200 new housing units, all as infill on east bank.
- * 95 acres for business park and light industry.



Plan Critique

- Safety and use of parks an important concern, large new park on west bank with no residential units nearby.
- Overly large park on west bank, limiting land available for economic development.
- Development market limited to office and light-industrial use, 25 years of NWIP has not filled available land.
- Aesthetics of parkway experience limited by plain architecture of most light-industrial buildings, likewise access from north Minneapolis is through light-industrial area.
- Some potential for competition with downtown, if large areas are planned for office park development.
- Lack of balance between available land uses.



Photomontage rendering shows aerial view south to downtown. New parks, highlighted in green are shown along the east and west banks. Domes at the Upper Harbor Terminal are shown retained as part of an industrial theme park.

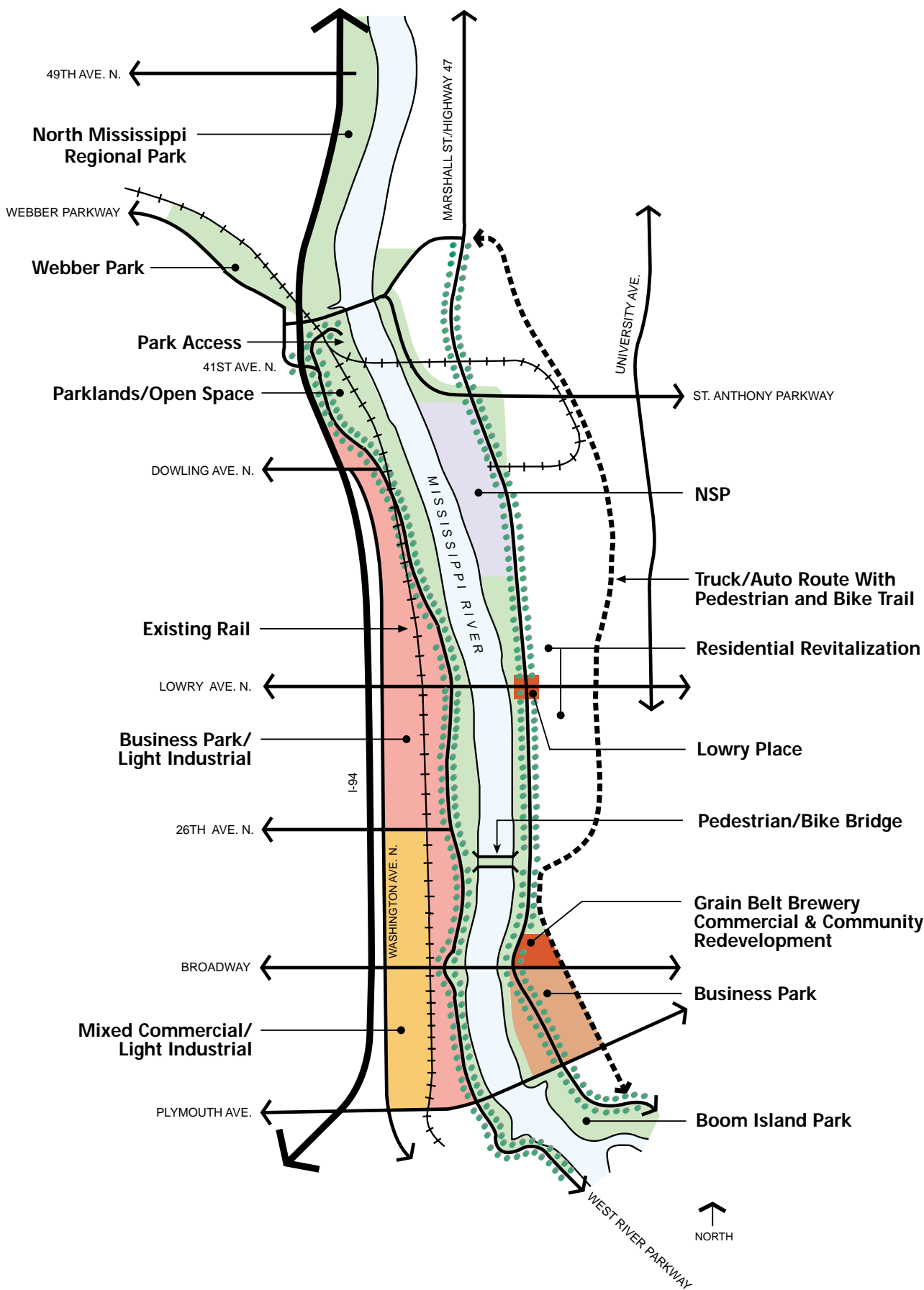
Implementation Issues

- Incremental approach.
- Reliance on City funding, tax increment financing.
- Potential for drift, inaction, and continued location of undesirable uses in light-industrial areas.

Parks and Light Industry

“The River Green”

Second Option



Distinguishing Features

- ◆ Business park and light industrial district on west bank.
- ◆ Barging is discontinued.
- ◆ West River Parkway extends along river.
- ◆ Wide new parklands on west bank.
- ◆ BN Bridge converted to pedestrian and bicycle facility.
- ◆ Rail service continues on west bank, BN spur on east bank removed.

Parks and Residential

Description

The “Parks and Residential” alternative anticipates that barging on the Upper River will decline and be discontinued. The riverbank is a continuous park along both banks (excluding NSP). The major difference with the second option is that a significant area of new housing is shown north of Lowry Ave. on the west bank. In addition, a strip of residential is shown south of Lowry immediately west of the new riverfront park. The plan envisions development of a completely new neighborhood on the west bank, where only scattered housing currently exists next to industrial sites. This residential concept calls for a change in City policy regarding the conversion of heavy-industrial land, with residential uses favored rather than light industry.

Features

- * 162 acres of new parkland.
- * 15 miles of bike lanes and recreation trails.
- * 5.25 miles of parkway or boulevard.
- * 4 miles of riverbank restoration.
- * Approximately 1,700 new housing units.
- * 55 acres for business park and light industry.



Plan Critique

- Residential units guarantee people in parks, increasing use and safety.
- Residential best use of river views and park amenities.
- Better mix of land uses and market potential.
- Potential for conflicts with light-industrial uses.
- Block of residential south of Lowry too narrow.
- Standards for pollution remediation higher.
- Questions about cohesiveness of neighborhood between river and interstate.
- Impacts of trucks and rail a concern.
- Excellent location for downtown workers.
- Meets City housing goals.
- Overly large park on west bank, limiting land available for economic development.
- Better environment for access from north Minneapolis, better environment for views from trails and east bank.
- Provides move-up housing for north Minneapolis.
- Increase in local residents helps build constituency to support river restoration and hospitality and retail uses.



Photomontage rendering shows aerial view south to downtown. New parks, highlighted in green are shown along the east and west banks. A new residential neighborhood is shown in mixed colors between I-94 and the river. An amphitheater is shown just south of the Soo Line bridge.

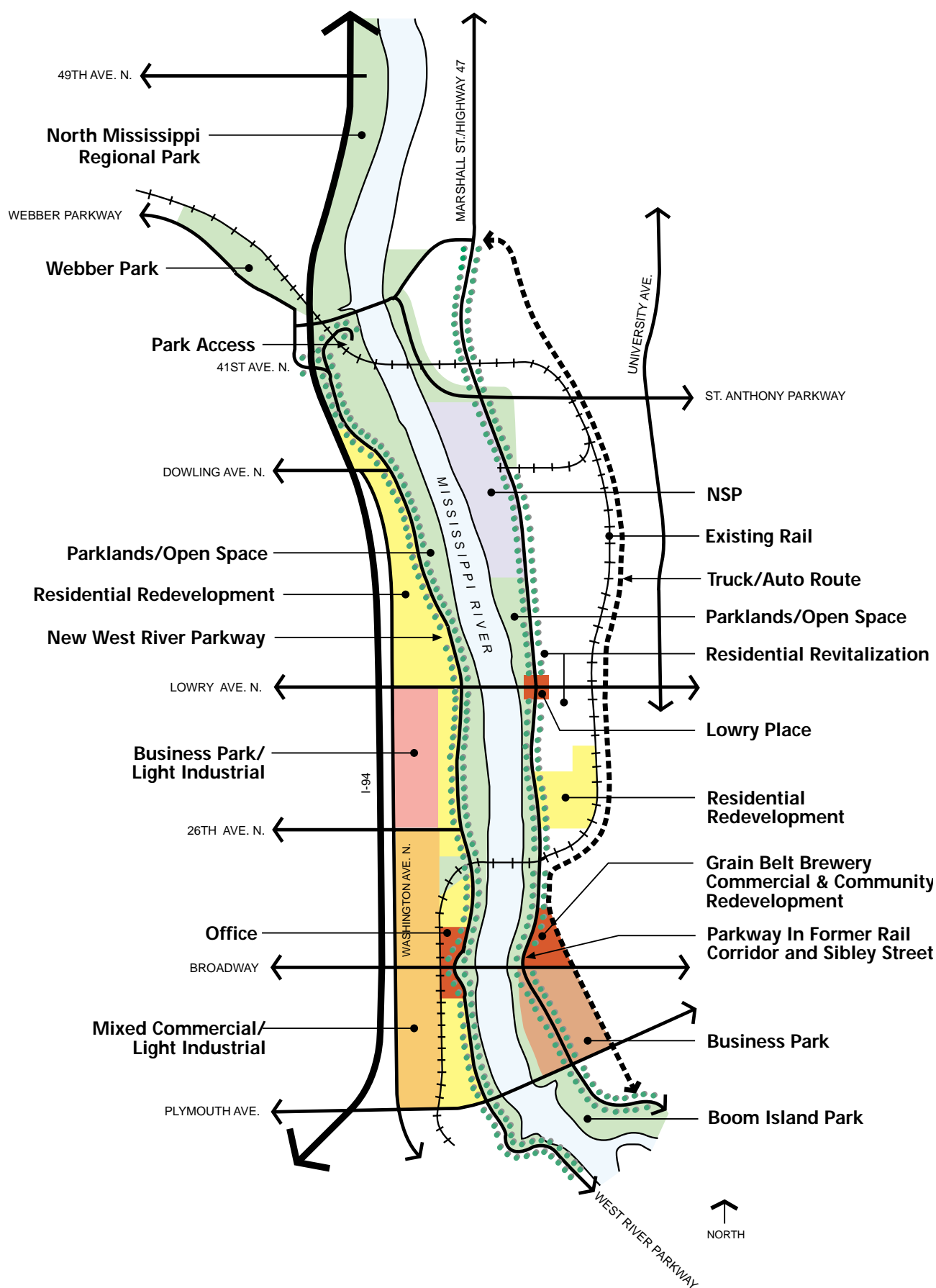
Implementation Issues

- High cost of land-use change.
- Visionary plan has potential to attracts funds from outside city, including state, federal, and private sources.
- Anti-sprawl justification for action.
- Potential to find broad support and champions.
- Recognizes current development trends along river.
- Call for radical change, rather than incremental approach.

Parks and Residential

“The River Green”

Third Option



Distinguishing Features

- ◆ New neighborhood on west bank.
- ◆ Barging is discontinued.
- ◆ West River Parkway extends along river.
- ◆ Wide new parklands on west bank.
- ◆ Residential redevelopment east of Marshall St. at Gluek Park.
- ◆ Rail service continues on east side, BN Bridge remains in rail use.

Evaluation

Comments were received on the three concept plan alternatives during a series of public meetings, small group discussions, presentations to elected officials, and regular meetings with Park Board, City Planning, MCDA, and County staff sitting as the Upper River Master Plan technical advisory committee. In addition, a group of national advisors in the areas of real estate, conservation, and waterfront development critiqued the plans. Following this input a formal evaluation was conducted which critiqued each of the alternatives in reference to planning and policy statements published by public agencies with jurisdiction over the study area. Full reports on comments and the evaluation are available in the Appendix.

Review and comments by:

- Minneapolis City Council Members
- Minneapolis City Planning Commission
- Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
- Hennepin County Commissioners
- National advisory panel
- Interested citizens
- Organized environmental groups
- Business representatives and organizations
- Upper River Master Plan technical advisory committee

Planning and Policy statements:

- Consistent objectives identified in over 25 years of previous planning for the Upper River
- Stated planning objectives and planning principles
- *The Minneapolis Plan*, 1997
- City of Minneapolis Housing Principles, 1995
- Critical Area and Mississippi River and Recreation Area plans

During the review a number of components from the “Parks and Light Industry” and “Parks and Residential” alternatives received positive comments, with encouragement to create a plan that seeks the highest and best use of land adjacent to the river. Representatives from heavy industry with parcels along the riverfront expressed general opposition to the overall planning objectives; however some representatives did state that if they were given a timeframe in the range of 10 to 20 years for implementation they might be able to support the plan. It is clear that the “Heavy Industry and Parks” alternative had a number of contradictions and unmet planning objectives, while receiving little support from heavy industry, elected officials, or the public.

“Parks and Residential” favored plan

Because the parks and open space plan for the two “River Green” alternatives was basically identical, many of the parks development, riverbank restoration, and habitat creation goals were met by either the residential or light-industrial concepts. In regard to parks and access, the residential concept had the important differences of a local user base and more lively and interesting environment provided by a new neighborhood, as opposed to a business park. The most important criterion then was in the area of neighborhood development

impacts under the “Parks and Residential” alternative, with the conclusions that:

There is only one Mississippi River, and housing takes better long-term advantage of the river as an amenity than can industry.

New parkland and housing provide the greatest opportunity to dramatically change the character of the riverfront in north and northeast Minneapolis.

Calculations regarding potential tax-base development showed that medium- to high-density residential development will result in more tax base than industrial uses. In addition, an approach to implementation that recognized the value of a visionary plan won favor among many participants. The Master Plan proposes the concept of a new neighborhood for north Minneapolis, on the west bank of the Mississippi, as a radical point of departure from historical inertia favoring heavy industry. This approach calls for action at a large scale, rather than incremental change. Funding sources outside the City of Minneapolis can be sought with the promise of real change and a host of benefits to the overall community.

Park programming review

Regarding park programming, an industrial heritage theme that retained warehouse domes and other structures found little support. Fishing piers and boating facilities were more desired than athletic fields, courts, or amusement features in riverfront parks; however a full marina was deemed unfeasible. In fact, programming of the parks received little comment, with the focus on land-use issues, but restoration of wildlife habitat and encouragement of riverfront entertainment and hospitality sites were strongly favored.













































Synthesis




Following the evaluation of the three alternatives, a final “Preferred Plan” concept was synthesized. This synthesis plan contains many of the recommendations of the “Parks and Residential” concept, but also recognizes and addresses potential conflicts between land uses and refines the plan in regard to open space development. With a large number of interest groups, holding divergent values and concepts of the study area, a balance of land provided for a variety of uses came to be a fundamental goal for the final concept plan.

Key critique issues for synthesis:

- New neighborhood on west bank is best use of land.
- Strip of residential south of Lowry is too narrow.
- 162 acres of new parklands is excessive from an urban design point of view and does not provide the necessary economic development potential to aid park development.
- Plenty of space can still be provided for light industry under residential option.
- Truck and traffic impacts must be mitigated, but conversion of Marshall St. to parkway is not feasible, use of rail corridor was strongly rejected by public.
- Hospitality destinations should be retained and reinforced with additional venues.

Preferred Plan Basis of Selection: Assessment Summary

Assessment Criteria	Plan Alternatives			
	Heavy Industry & Parks	Parks & Light Industry	Parks & Residential	Preferred Plan
1) Consistent Objectives over 25 Years and Planning Objectives of 1999 Upper River Master Plan				
2) Upper River Master Planning Principles				
3) Review/Critique by National Advisory Panel				
4) Review/Critique by City Council				
5) Review/Critique by City Planning Commission				
6) Development and Application of Evaluation Criteria				
7) Response from Public Participation Process				
8) Response to Policy Directions in <i>The Minneapolis Plan</i>				
9) Response to City of Minneapolis Housing Principles				
10) Critical Area and MNRRA Plan Policies and Goals				
11) Potential for Implementation Funding from Regional, State, National Sources				

- Legend
-  Plan Supports Assessment Criteria
 -  Plan Neutral to Assessment Criteria
 -  Plan Does Not Support Assessment Criteria

Preferred Plan

Description

The “Preferred Plan” proposes that the best use of land on the west bank is a mix of new residential, light industry, office, and commercial development. In a major departure from Minneapolis Park Board models for waterfront parkway development, the plan calls for swinging the parkway away from the immediate riverfront south of Lowry, to the east side of the CP railroad corridor, providing a buffer between light industries and the new residential area. This alignment allows creation of a riverfront promenade, with immediate access from residential units and hospitality venues to the waterfront without having to cross a road with vehicular traffic. This design also doubles the width of the residential redevelopment in this area from one block to two, forming a more cohesive base for this community.

The width of new parklands north of Lowry was narrowed from those shown in the “River Green” concepts to increase the space for housing and tax base, while also reducing the amount of land to be maintained by the Park Board. A further refinement recognizes the excellent freeway access at Dowling Ave. by calling for a mixed-use development including offices and housing. Citizen comments about the potential for a conference center along the river was seconded by the national advisory panel, with the Grain Belt complex as the most desirable site. While this conference center idea is included in the plan, the MCDA reserves the ability to develop the Grain Belt to other uses as development proposals are offered.

Residents of northeast Minneapolis rejected the concept of a truck route utilizing the BN railroad corridor. This proposed route was seen as too disruptive to the surrounding neighborhood, and therefore is not included in the Preferred Plan. The issue of traffic on Marshall remained unsolved, leading to an effort to mitigate the impacts with a new roadway designed as a landscaped boulevard instead of a true Minneapolis parkway.

Features

- * 95 acres of new parkland.
- * 15 miles of recreation trails.
- * 5.25 miles of parkway.
- * 4 miles of riverbank restoration.
- * Approximately 2,500 new housing units.
- * 55 acres for business park and light industry.



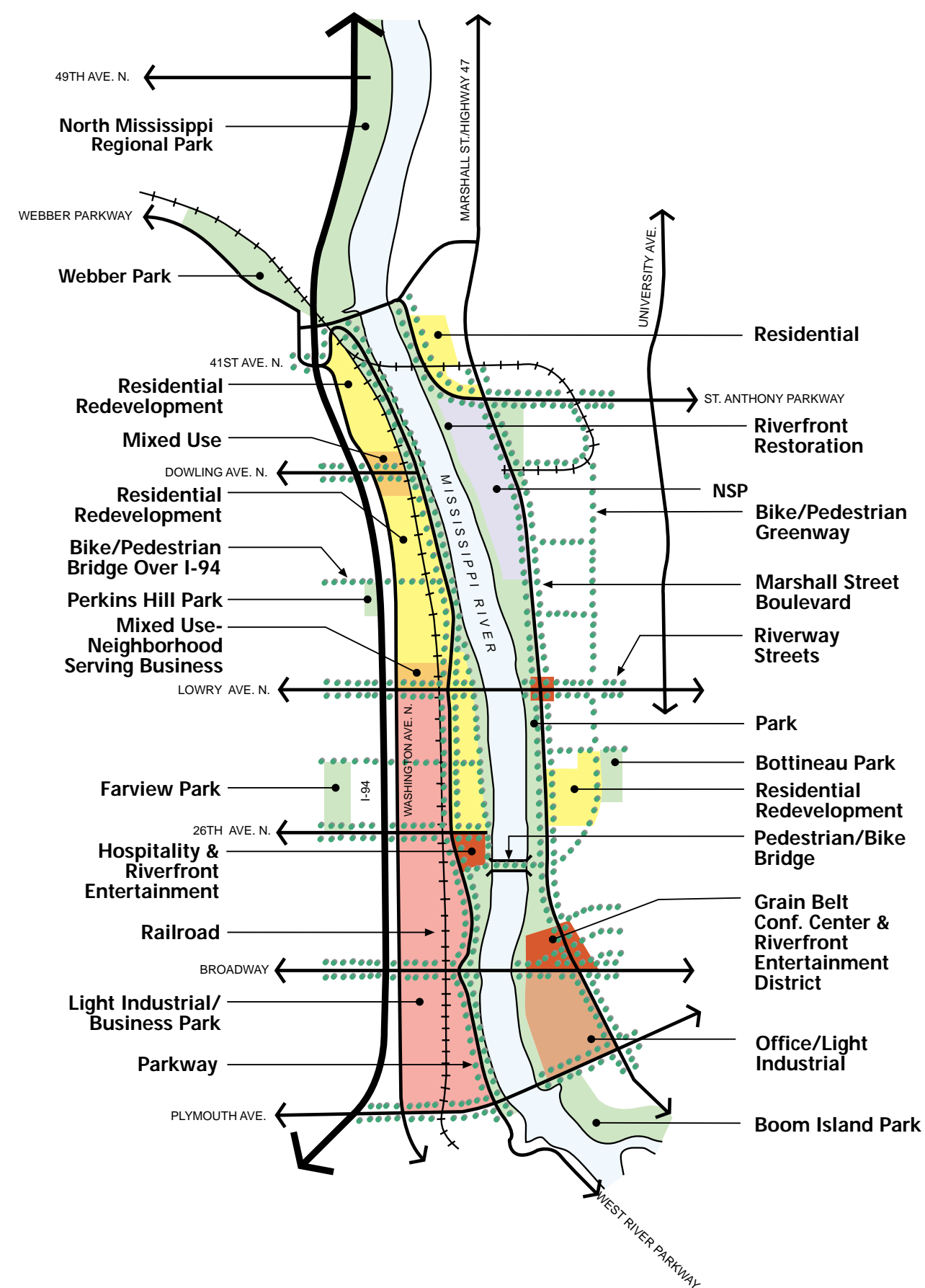
Plan Critique

- Takes best advantage of the river as an amenity.
- Acknowledges probable, eventual discontinuation of barging on the Upper River.
- Strikes a balance between jobs and housing.
- Results in greatest tax-base development.
- Best potential for revitalization in north and northeast Minneapolis.
- Provides locations for lively riverfront entertainment and hospitality sites.
- Recognizes growing concern about traffic on Minneapolis parkways by proposing pedestrian promenade along waterfront.

Implementation Issues

- Most able to attract regional, state, and national support.
- Tax base maximized for tax increment financing.
- Visionary approach most likely to find champions.

Preferred Plan



Features

- ◆ New neighborhood on west bank.
- ◆ Pedestrian promenade along river south of Lowry.
- ◆ West River Parkway acts as buffer between uses.
- ◆ Opportunities for entertainment and hospitality destinations.
- ◆ Mixed-use, higher-intensity development at Dowling Ave.
- ◆ BN Bridge converted to pedestrian and bicycle facility.
- ◆ Rail service continues on west bank.